

A Traitor to Rome (Rutilius Namatianus 2.41—60)

The Roman general Stilicho died in 408, two years before the sack of Rome by the Goths. He was beheaded on the orders of the Emperor Honorius, suspected of plotting against the Emperor, in collusion with the barbarian Alaric, to place his own son on the throne.¹ As the *magister utriusque militiae*, the member of the imperial family and the tutor of the young Emperor Honorius², Stilicho had been for over ten years the effective ruler of the Western Empire.³ In his lifetime he was hailed the saviour of Rome by the poet Claudius Claudianus, after his death he was branded as a traitor to Rome by the poet Rutilius Namatianus, and paradoxically, he was blamed for the fall of Rome, which he, if he had lived, might have been able to prevent.

My first intention was to make a comparison between the pictures of a hero and of a traitor to Rome made by Claudian and Rutilius, respectively. However, considering the matter more closely I have left out the reference to a hero. The reason is that in the Romans' ideological thinking and in their ideological writing there was only one possibility: after the fall of Rome there were no heroes to Rome; and accordingly Stilicho was a traitor, for the simple reason that ultimately he could not prevent the sack of Rome and the plundering of the city.

Between 395 (when after the death of Theodosius the Great the Roman Empire was irrevocably divided and the barbarian troops under the leadership of the Visigothic Alaric began to ravage inside the Roman imperial frontiers) and 495 (when Theoderic the Great was proclaimed the king of Italy), the Roman empire in the West could not resist barbarian incursions. Italy and the western provinces were gradually occupied by Germanic peoples mostly migrating under pressure from the barbarian Huns. In 401—402 and again in 403 Alaric invaded Italy but was forced to withdraw by Stilicho. After Stilicho's death in 408 there was no general able to defeat the Visigoths, and on 24 August 410 they entered Rome

¹ See, e.g., Orosius 7.38.1 ff., Zosimus 5.32.1; Zosomen 9.4.4—8. On the accusations raised against Stilicho, Lellia CRACCO RUGGINI, „De morte persecutorum” e polemica antibarbarica nella storiografia pagana e cristiana, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 4, 1968, 433—447.

² Stilicho was married to Theodosius' adopted daughter Serena, and he had made his position in the imperial house even stronger by marrying his own daughter, Maria, to Honorius.

³ For Stilicho's regency, S. MAZZARINO, *Stilicone. La crisi imperiale dopo Teodosio*, Rome 1942; A. CAMERON, Theodosius the Great and the Regency of Stilico. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 73, 1968, 247—80. Cf. A. CAMERON, Jacqueline LONG & Sherry LEE, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*, Univ. of California Press., 1993, 4: „In the West, Stilicho was the first in a long line of military dictators”.

and sacked it.⁴ Thus it was the first time Rome had fallen to a foreign enemy since its capture by the Gauls about eight centuries before. The Romans probably did not fully realize the meaning of the event, that the fall of Rome was a turning point in the world history: Rome was lost in the sense of the *caput orbis terrarum*. Nevertheless, in their minds they felt the loss. Since the invasion of the Gauls in 390 B.C. Rome had stayed untouched for eight centuries under the protection of the Capitoline gods; now the barbarian had entered the very heart of the *orbis terrarum*. In fact the feeling of the loss or the fear of the fall of Rome had been reality in the minds of the Roman nobles already before Alaric's final attack. At the time of Alaric's first invasion in Italy, in 401–402, there was discussion about the idea of moving the seat of the Western Empire to the Rhône in Gaul; not only moving the throne but also abandoning Rome for Gaul. The sentiments of the Roman nobility can be read in Claudian's words in his *Bellum Geticum* (296–301): *Quid turpes iam mente fugas, quid Gallica rura respicitis Latioque libet post terga relicto longinquum profugis Ararim praecingere castris? scilicet Arctois concessa gentibus urbe considet regnum Rhodano capitique superstes truncus erit?* „Without Rome the imperium will be a trunk without the head”.

Rutilius Claudius Namatianus was a Gallo-Roman, probably from Toulouse, the author of the famous *De reditu suo*, which is an elaborate poetical itinerary. Rutilius seems to be an adherent of the old paganism. Nevertheless, he yet held under the Christian Emperor Honorius the offices of *magister officiorum* and *praefectus urbi*. Whether or not he was a nominal Christian, it does not matter: his poetry surely stands firmly in the classical literary tradition; he was well trained in the schools of grammar and rhetoric, an erudite man, who had embraced the learning typical of the civilized Romans of the time. In 417 he left Rome to look after his estates in Gaul, which like Italy, had suffered from barbarian inroads.⁵ The poem mirrors the minds of pagan nobility, with which Rutilius shared the belief in Dea Roma and Rome's glorious mission which he celebrates in a long rhetorical eulogy of the *regina pulcherrima mundi*.⁶ Facing the fact that he is leaving Italy and Rome, the dearest part of the empire, which after the sack of Rome would never be the empire of old, he bursts into a bitter invective against Stilicho — nine years after his death — accusing him of treacherously introducing the barbarian troops into Rome, to the

⁴ A.H.M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols, Oxford 1964, I 170 ff.; E. DEMOUGEOT, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain*, Paris 1951, 395–410; E. DEMOUGEOT, *La formation de l'Europe et les invasions barbares*, Paris 1979; A. FERRILL, *The Fall of the Roman Empire. The Military Explanation*, London 1983, 86 ff.; P.J. HEATHER, *Goths and Romans*, Oxford 1991, 332–489.

⁵ For Rutilius, in general, E. DOBLHOFFER, 1972/1977. *Rutilius Claudius Namatianus, de reditu suo*, two vols, Heidelberg 1972/1977, I 18 ff.

⁶ For the personification of Rome in late Roman literature, particularly in Claudian, Prudentius and Rutilius, U. KNOCH, Ein Sinnbild römischer Selbstauffassung, *Symbola Colonensia J. Kroll*, Köln 1949, 143–162; M. FUHRMANN, Die Romidee der Spätantike, *Historische Zeitschrift* 207, 1968, 529–561. A. CAMERON, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*, Oxford 1970, 363 ff.

city which the ancestral gods and goddesses had protected for centuries. The poem is one of the most vehement attacks ever made against a person in Roman poetry (2.41—60):

*Quo magis est facinus diri Stilichonis acerbum,
proditor arcani quod fuit imperii.
Romano generi dum nititur esse superstes,
crudelis summis miscuit ima furor,
dumque timet, quidquid se fecerat ipse timeri,
immisit Latiae barbara tela neci.
visceribus nudis armatum condidit hostem
illatae cladis liberiore dolo.
ipsa satellitibus pellitis Roma patebat
et captiva prius quam caperetur erat.
nec tantum Geticis grassatus proditor armis:
ante Sibyllinae fata cremavit opis.
... omnia Tartarei cessent tormenta Neronis;
.. hic mundi matrem perculit, ille suam.*

Stilicho is 'injurious and pernicious', He is the 'traitor of the secrets of the empire', 'he strives for the total ruin of the Roman race', he is 'cruel and savage', 'frightening and fearful', 'barbarous and treacherous', 'violator of the sacred', 'matricide' even worse than Nero.

The picture given by Rutilius corresponds in many details those given by Claudian about Stilicho's rivals and opponets, Rufinus and Eutropius, evil advisers of Arcadius in the court of Constantinople: Claud. in Ruf. 1.318—19 *tunc impius ille proditor imperii coniuratusque Getarum*; in Ruf. 2.52—53 *Quod tantis Romana manus contextuit annis, proditor unus iners angusto tempore vertit*. Claudian denounces Rufinus as a traitor plotting with the Goths; with the same motifs Rutilius accuses Stilicho (*proditor ... arcani imperii; Geticis grassatus proditor armis*).

On the other hand the picture given by Rutilius is very similar to Claudian's and Prudentius' descriptions of Alaric, Rome's implacable foe: Claud. Get. 100—103 *procul arceat altus Iuppiter, ut delubra Numae sedesque Quirini barbaries oculis saltem temerare profanis possit et arcanum tanti deprendere regni*. Prudentius, contra Symm. 2. 692—697 *nullus mea barbarus hostis cuspide claustra quatit, non armis, veste comisque ignotus capta passim vagus errat in urbe, Transalpina meam rapiens in vincula pubem. Temptavit Geticus nuper delere tyrannus Italiam patrio veniens iuratus ab Histro has arces aequare solo, tecta aurea flammis solvere, mastrucis procures vestire togatos*. Claudian and Prudentius praise Stilicho for not allowing the barbarian tyrant to invade and pollute the sacred places of

Rome; Rutilius accuses Stilicho of acting like a tyrant who with his barbarian escort destroys the heart of the city.⁷

The comparison shows that Rutilius probably knew Claudian's and Prudentius' poems. He uses the same and similar phrases.⁸ But, what is more important, the comparison between these three poets shows that they share the same civilized culture, they draw their images and thoughts from the common source, the idealized past of Rome.

My intention is not to give an answer to the question, who is more trustworthy: Claudian who makes Stilicho a hero or Rutilius who makes Stilicho a traitor? I shall not say who gives the picture that is more in keeping with actual facts, to say, more historical. Certainly there is an important difference between Rutilius and Claudian, which makes impossible the comparison as to who gives the more reliable portrait of Stilicho: Claudian's hero was living, Rutilius' traitor was dead.

Stilicho never became a hero to Rome, a saviour like Camillus of old⁹, he did not succeed in uniting the western and eastern parts of the Empire under the sole regimen, he could not expell the barbarian invaders from Italy or assimilate them into Roman empire, as the poet propagandist Claudian had been wishing, and the Christian poet Prudentius (contra Symm. 2.709—711) sincerely hoped, welcoming him as the *comes* and *parens* of the *Christopotens* Honorius. The policy of clemency promoted by Theodosius and continued by Stilico, the policy of appeasement of the Goths, did not succeed, but it awakened suspicion in the intriguing men of Honorius' court;¹⁰ the result was that Stilicho was suspected to have treacherous intentions. Ironically, he was both too pagan, too Christian, and too barbarian for the Roman senators. Rumours spread that Stilicho had designs on the throne, and especially the general's pact with Alaric to give gold for his help against rebellious troops in the west, was considered an act of treason.

But I am not interested in the historical truth. I only want to point out the characteristics of the traitor to Rome picted by Rutilius, characteristics which, in my opinion, are not new; on the contrary, they are old commonplaces, learnt in the schools of

⁷ For a comparison between Prudentius and Rutilius and their concept of „barbarian“, H. A. GÄRTNER, *Rome et les barbares dans la poésie latine au temps d'Augustin: Rutilius Namatianus et Prudence. Ktema. Civilisations de l'Orient, de la Grèce et Rome antiques* 9, 1984, 113—121.

⁸ For verbal echoes from Claudian in Prudentius and Rutilius, CAMERON, *Claudian*, op. cit. 248—252, 469—473. Certainly, Rutilius knew Claudian's poetry. It is ironic that Rutilius attacks Stilicho with the same motifs Claudian had used to defend him against his enemies, but whether or not Rutilius intentionally turned Claudian's propaganda for Stilicho against him, cannot, however, be proved.

⁹ Cf. A. CAMERON, *Claudian*, op. cit. 268: „For it was Claudian's aim, precisely, to present Stilico as a Camillus, a Scipio, a Cato“.

¹⁰ On the Theodosian policy of appeasement with the Goths and on the fall of Stilicho, A. FERRILL, op. cit. 97 ff., S. MAZZARINO, *Stilicone*, op. cit., and J.M. O'FLYNN, *Generalissimos of the Western Empire*, Edmonton 1983, 50—62.

rhetoric, often recurring in the poets and in the history books and deeply implanted in the minds of the Roman civilized nobility. Whether or not Stilicho really acted treacherously against Rome or committed a crime of lese-majesty, the fact remains that in the poem of Rutilius he is pictured as an arch-traitor to Rome, and as we can see in the expressions cited from legal documents and from Jerome and Orosius, all, not only the representatives of pagan nobility, like Rutilius, but also the Christians shared the opinion that Stilicho betrayed his Rome. The evidence of the documents is clear enough: Cod. Theod. 9.42.22 *opes ... quibus ille usus est ad omnem ditandam inquietandamque barbariem*; Hieronym. epist. 123,16 *Quis hoc crederet? ... Romam in gremio suo, non pro gloria, sed pro salute pugnare? immo ne pugnare quidem, sed auro et cuncta superlectili vitam redimere? Quod non vitio principum, qui vel religiosissimi sunt, sed scelere semibarbari accicit proditoris, qui nostris contra nos opibus armavit inimicos*; Orosius 7,38,1 ff. *Interea comes Stilicho Eucherium filium suum, sicut a plerisque fertur, iam inde Christianorum persecutionem a puero privatoque meditantem, in imperium quoquo modo sustinere nitebatur. Quamobrem Alaricem cunctamque Gothorum gentem occulto foedere fovens, ad terendam terendamque rem publicam reservavit ... Stilicho qui ut unum puerum purpura indueret, totius generis humani sanguinem dedit.*

The Latin writers of the fourth and fifth century had a limited knowledge of the Roman past. I quote Cameron: ¹¹ „For the most part it derives, not from histories proper, but from poets and rhetorical handbooks. Indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that for Claudian the Republic was little more than an anthology of *exempla virtutis et vitii*.” This holds true for Rutilius, too. This also means that the periods which most interested Claudian, Prudentius and Rutilius were the time of the kings and the early Republic. The knowledge is limited maybe, but it also is very suggestive in the sense that the themes are common, reflecting the ideas of Rome’s mission in the world’s history.

There are two main elements, from which Rutilius forms his picture of Rome’s traitor. Firstly, the concept of the sacred city, and the concepts of *fides* and *ius gentium*, that is, the *proditor* of a city is the violator of the sacred bonds of *fides*. Secondly, the Romans’ *odium regni*, the concept of *tyrannus* in the Roman ideology.

Firstly, the picture of the traitor in Rutilius (*proditor arcani imperii*). Through the Roman history, the Roman writers, who believed in the greatness of Rome, have been proclaiming the justification and legitimation of Rome’s conquering and surrendering other cities and foreign nations. The justification is based on the idea of the *bellum iustum*. Actually, if we look at history books, at the narration of Rome’s growth in the time of the kings, and then in the first centuries of the Republic, the story about Rome is a story about conquering cities, or to say it more precisely, a list of cities which one after another fell under Rome’s dominion. In their narration the Roman writers pay special attention to the way how cities were surrendered, whether the occupation of a city was a result of *bellum*

¹¹ A. CAMERON, *Claudian*, op. cit. 350.

ius); was it in accordance with the *ars Romana*, or as Livy says, with the *religio Romana*, that means with the Roman way to exercise justice and not to violate the secret bonds of *fides*. Therefore the Romans did not accept any pacts or agreements concerning the capitulation of a city; this is naturally true when the fate of Rome herself was at stake, as in the memorably event when the Gauls were sacking Rome, but also when they themselves conquered a city they did not accept pacts proposed by the other side; if someone offered his city to the Romans, he was punished as liable to treachery, and the victory achieved by the Roman general was regarded to be shameful and not worth of a triumph.¹²

This idea about a kind of sacred *ius gentium*, fostered by the Romans, can be clearly seen, for instance, in the examples cited from Livy and Ammianus Marcellinus:

Liv. 42.47.5—7 *non per insidias et nocturna proelia, ... nec ut astu magis quam vera virtute gloriarentur, bella maiores gessisse... eadem fide indicatum Pyrrho regi vitae eius insidiantem; eadem Faliscis victum traditum proditorem liberorum; religionis haec Romanae esse, non versutiarum Punicarum neque calliditatis Graecae, apud quos fallere hostem quam vi superare gloriosius fuerit.*

Amm. Marc. 25.9.9—11 *Numquam enim ab urbis ortu inveniri potest annalibus replicatis (ut arbitror), terrarum pars ulla nostrarum ab imperatore vel consule hosti concessa, sed ne ob recepta quidem quae direpta sunt .. triumphales glorias fuisse delatas ... Id etiam memoriae nos veteres docent in extremis casibus icta cum dedecore foedera, postquam partes verbis iuravere conceptis, repetitione bellorum ilico dissoluta.*

The texts also show that the Romans were proud of their interpretation of the *fides*. In this they differed from other peoples; actually it seems that other nations, the Greeks and the Punic, were treacherous by nature. There are many cases in the Roman history when a pact or an agreement was made between the opposing parties, and the *foedus* was not regarded as valid, but it led to the fall of the city or to a shameful defeat of the other part. The most famous cases are the *dolus* of Mettius Fufetius and the fall of Alba, the fall of Gabii by the *dolus* of the tyrannical Tarquinius Superbus, and then the pact made with the barbarian Brennus when the Gauls sacked Rome.¹³ One of the stock-examples used in the schools of rhetoric is the fall of Falerii referred also by Livy in the above quotation (42.47.5—7).¹⁴ When Camillus was campaigning at Falerii, a schoolmaster came from the town to him and brought his pupils as hostages to secure his town by this act. Camillus refused to profit treachery of the man, returned the children safely and send the

¹² Cf. also Cic. fin. 5.62 *quis Pullum Numitorium Fregellanum proditorem, quamquam rei publicae nostrae profuit, non odit?* Cic. Tusc. 4.18 *nemo enim parricidae aut proditoris supplicio misericordia commovetur.*

¹³ See Liv. 1.27—28; 1.53—54; 5.48—49. Cf., for instance, Liv. 1.28.6 *Mettius foederis Romani Albanique ruptor;* Claud. IV cons. Hon. 402 *perfidiam damnas? Metti satiabere poenis.*

¹⁴ The story of the fall of Falerii is told in Livy 5.26—27.

schoolmaster back in chains. The citizens of Falerii were so struck by the example of Roman justice and clemency that they surrendered. The main content of stories like this is that there is a *ius gentium* that society is founded not on contract but on nature.¹⁵ The same ideas are reflected in Rutilius when he speaks about Stilicho's *dolus*, that Stilicho was a *proditor arcani imperii*. There is no need to seek after more concrete meanings for *arcanum*.¹⁶ Now it was the third time when the secret laws of the city Rome were violated and Rome's existence was threatened. First time was when the Gauls sacked Rome, the second after the Julio-Claudian dynasty, as we can see in Tacitus (hist. 1.4.2): *Finis Neronis ut laetus primo gaudiendum impetu fuerat, ita varios motus animorum non modo in urbe apud patres aut populum aut urbanum militem, sed omnes legiones ducesque conciverat, evulgato imperii arcano, posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri*.

Secondly, Rutilius describes Stilicho with the attributes of a *tyrannus*. He is an absolute ruler governing outside any law and exercising his authority in a cruel and oppressive way (43–44): *Romano generi dum nititur esse superstes, crudelis summis miscuit ima furor*.

This is clearly a picture of the tyrant; not, however, the *tyrannus* bearing the specific meaning which it often had in imperial times to refer to an usurper,¹⁷ liable to the crime of the *affectatio regni*, the crime of lease-majesty, as it is the case when Claudian describes as tyrants the pretenders Magnus Maximus, the murderer of the Emperor Gratian, and Eugenius, the murderer of the Valentinian the Second, „those who fall not as warriors at a victors hand, but as criminals before a judge”, and also when he represents Gildo's defeat as a completion of Theodosius' activity to suppress usurpers.¹⁸

Rutilius' *tyrannus*, is not an usurper, but the old type of oriental and barbarian ruler who lives outside any laws; who is surrounded with terror, frightening in his fear (45 *dumque timet, quidquid se fecerat ipse timeri*).¹⁹ who is prone to avarity, savagery, and frenzy (43–44 *Romano generi dum nititur esse superstes, crudelis summis miscuit ima*

¹⁵ Cf. Liv. 5.27.6 *Nobis cum Faliscis quae pacto fit humano societas non est: quam ingeneravit natura utrisque est eritque. Sunt et belli, sicut pacis, iura, iusteque ea non minus quam fortiter didicimus gerere*.

¹⁶ For different explanations of *arcanum*, E. DOBLHOFER, op. cit. II 275–276.

¹⁷ Cf. Tac. ann. 1,72 *si quis proditione exercitum aut plebem seditionibus, denique male gesta re publica maiestatem minuisset*.

¹⁸ Claud. Prob. 108 *geminisque fidem mentita tyrannis*; IV cons. Hon. 72–73 *per varium gemini scelus erupere tyranni tractibus occiduis*; IV cons. Hon. 89 *non hostes victore cadunt, sed iudice sontes*; Gild. 16 *tertius occubuit nati virtute tyrannus*.

¹⁹ Claud. IV cons. Hon. 290–91 *Qui terret, plus ipse timet; sors ista tyrannis convenit*. Cf. Cic. rep. 2.45 (Tarquinius Superbus) *cum metueret ipse poenam sceleris sui summam, menui se volebat*; Sen. de clem. *tantum enim necesse est timeat, quantum timeri voluit*, Sen. de ira 2.11.3. *necesse est multos timeat quem multi timent* (Laberius; Macr. sat. 2.7.4).

furor)²⁰; who is a criminal, morally vicious ruler like Tarquinius, Sulla, Tiberius, or Nero;²¹ and finally, who, in general, is barbarian both in his outlook and behaviour (46 *immisit Latiae barbara tela neci*, 49 *ipsa satellitibus pellitis Roma patebat*).²²

To conclude: Rutilius' picture of the *proditor* Stilicho, being both a violator of *fides* and a *tyrannus*, can be paralleled in the history of Rome only with one person, Mettius Fufetius, the king of Alba. But as a barbarian tyrant Rutilius' traitor has many models, the Greek kings like Antiochus and Philippos, the Sicilian tyrants, the perfidious Punic Hannibal and the treacherous Gaul Brennus in particular. As a criminal, morally vicious ruler, his precedents were Tarquinius Superbus, Sulla, Tiberius and Nero. The picture of the *proditor* and the picture of the *tyrannus*, as pictured by Rutilius, may seem contradictory about the same person. Usually they are. But in the Roman ideology which is rooted in the thinking of the Republican times, they are combined with the concept of the *fides barbarica* — that is, the barbarians are naturally perfidious — and with the concept of *tyrannus* — that is, the tyrant is barbarian in nature.

²⁰ Cf. Claud. in Ruf. 1.305—305 *Sic avidus praedo iam non per singula saevit, sed scaepris inferre minas omnique perempto milite Romanas ardet prosternere vires.*

²¹ Cf. Claud. IV cons. Hon. 309—315 *Romani, qui cuncta diu rexere, regendi, qui nec Tarquinii fastus nec iura tulere Caesaris. Annales veterum delicta loquuntur. haerebunt maculae. quis non per saecula damnat Caesareae portenta domus? quem dira Neronis funera, quem rupes Capreaeum taetra latebit incesto possessa seni?;* in Ruf. 1.251—53 *Quid tale immanes unquam gessisse fertur ... vel carcere Sulla; IV cons. Hon. 383 (Gildo) ... vi captus et armis, non Bocchi Sullaeque dolis.*

²² Cf. Claud. in Eutr. 1. 181—184 *Asperius nihil est humili cum surgit in altum; cuncta ferit dum cuncta timet, desaevit in omnes ut se posse putent, nec belua taetrius ulla quam servi rabies in libera terga furentis;* Prudentius, contra Symm. 816—817 *Sed tantum distans Romana et barbara, quantum quandrupes abiuncta est bibedi, vel muta loquenti.*